

CORRESPONDENCE

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CRIMINAL ABORTION IN THE USA

To the Editor, The Eugenics Review

Sir,—They do things in a big way in the United States, and that is certainly so with criminal abortions if the estimate of about a million a year, quoted by Dr. Glanville Williams in his review of *Criminal Abortion: A Study in Medical Sociology** by J. E. Bates and E. S. Zawadzki, is to be believed. This is nearly three times our own rate if the widely quoted figure of 100,000 a year in Great Britain is accepted, which I myself have suggested may be anything up to ten times too high.†

It is worth looking at some of the implications of a million criminal abortions a year in the USA. With a population of about 180 million, rather more than half female, and assuming a mean expectation of life for women of seventy years with a child-bearing period of thirty years, there will be somewhat less than 40 million women who could undergo criminal abortions,

which makes one for every forty women each year. This means that there must be three criminal abortions for every four women, on average, over their whole lives.

However, quite a lot of women are not really in the market for criminal abortions, whether because of religious or other scruples, or through natural infertility, or because they contrive to plan their families to their own satisfaction using other less drastic, dangerous, and expensive methods. So those that remain, and they are going to have to number many millions, will be *averaging* considerably more than one criminal abortion each during their lives—unless of course there is something wrong with the estimate of a million a year, upon which all these calculations are based.

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* *Eugen. Rev.* 1965. 56, 216.

† *Ibid.* 1964. 55, 197–200.